



15th Sunday After Pentecost

Sunday before the Exaltation of the Cross & Apodosis of the Nativity of the Theotokos

12 / 25 September

Resurrection Tropar, Tone 6: The angelic powers were at Thy tomb; / the guards became as dead men. / Mary stood by Thy grave, / seeking Thy most pure Body. / Thou didst capture hell, not being tempted by it. / Thou didst come to the Virgin, granting life. / O Lord who didst rise from the Dead, / Glory to Thee!

Troparion of the Mother of God tone 4: Thy birth, O Mother of God, / has brought joy to all the world; / for from thee arose the Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God, / Who, having dissolved the curse, has given His blessing, / and having abolished death, has granted us life eternal.

Resurrection Kondak, Tone 6: When Christ God the Giver of Life, / raised all of the dead from the valleys of misery with His Mighty Hand, / He bestowed resurrection on the human race. / He is the Saviour of all, the Resurrection, the Life, and the God of All.

Kontakion of the Mother of God tone 4: Joachim and Anna were freed from the reproach of childlessness / and Adam and Eve from the corruption of death, O Immaculate One, by thy holy nativity. / And thy people, redeemed from the guilt of sin, / celebrate thy birth

Matins Gospel IV

Epistle for Sunday before Exaltation: Galatians 6: 11-18

Epistle for Sunday: II Corinthians 4: 6-15

For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed-- Always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us, but life in you. And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke," we also believe and therefore speak, Knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.

WE HAVE THE SAME SPIRIT OF FAITH...KNOWING THAT HE WHO RAISED UP

THE LORD JESUS WILL ALSO RAISE US UP

And where did He command light to shine out of darkness? In the beginning and in prelude to the Creation ...Now He said nothing, but Himself became Light for us ...We do not see sensible objects by the shining of this Light, but God Himself through Christ. Do you see the invariableness in the Trinity?...

And what is the 'dying of the Lord Jesus,' which they bore about? Their daily deaths by which also the resurrection was shown ...Do you see how he has discovered yet another reason for the trials?... That His life may also be manifested in our body ...We bear about His dying so the power of His life may be made manifest, who did not permit mortal flesh - even undergoing such great suffering - to be overcome by the blizzard of these calamities ...And he says in another place, 'If we die with Him, we will also live with Him' (II Tim. 2:11). For as we endure His dying now, and choose while living to die for His sake: so also He will choose, when we are dead, to beget us then into life. For if we come from life into death, He will also lead us by the hand from death into life.

St. John Chrysostom. Homily VIII, 3, & IX, 1, on II Corinthians IV. B#56, pp. 319, 321-322

Epistle for the Theotokos Phillipians 2: 5-11

Gospel for Sunday: Matthew 22: 35-46

Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, Saying, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?" They said to Him, "The Son of David." He said to them, "How then does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord,' saying: 'The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool?" "If David then calls Him 'Lord,' how is He his Son?" And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore.

THE GREAT COMMANDMENT IN THE LAW

"Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked Him a question, tempting Him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law?" (Mt. 22:35).

If you were attentive to how the Holy Church, revealing to us the mystery of our salvation, gradually shows us in the Sunday Gospel readings the way of resurrection for the human soul, then you also noticed that starting from Easter until today there were several cycles. One of these cycles convinced us that the Lord is our Saviour, our Saviour from sin, and that He is All-powerful. And further we were shown the dispositions, the states of mind which should be in the soul of every Christian, in order to perceive that power which the Lord has given to us, establishing our salvation in the plan of eternal life. These Gospel readings opened to us the feeling of humility and devotion to God, in understanding the Word of God as acting in our life. And then these cycles changed into others, and we came to a cycle which revealed that all this which God gives us can be accomplished, but only within the limits of the Church. Like the boat in which the Apostles were sailing, it preserved the Apostles. And this boat was like the laws in which lived and lives the Church, which protects those who are in the boat from all the troubles that occur outside of it.

But this is possible only if, on our part, we are obedient to the Lord. And such obedience is connected with certain experiences, in the same way the Apostles experienced them: storm and fear. But if we presume upon the power of God, then we lose obedience and, instead of obedience, we receive boldness. And the same could happen to us which happened to the Apostle Peter, who in a transport of delight and daring, asked Christ for permission to walk to Him on the waves. And Christ in a way answered him: walk, if you want to. This was no longer obedience; this was not the will of Christ, but the will of Peter. And then Peter found himself alone in the water; the waves were so high that Christ was not even visible. Here Peter came to his senses: the law of nature took hold of him; he became frightened and started to drown. And only a strong faith in the Lord and the constant trust in the Almighty saved him (Mt. 14:24-31).

And further: in the Gospel about the filling of five thousand people with five loaves of bread, again the Lord seemed to be talking in a mysterious way about the Church. "Give ye them to eat!" He said to the Apostles, declining their attempt to let the people go into the neighbouring villages to buy food (Mt. 14:16). Does this not mean that He entrusted them, the Apostles and their successors, with feeding people the true food, His Body and Blood, in the Sacrament of the Divine Eucharist? And when He ordered the people to sit in groups, does it not symbolise the organisation of the Church?

The Sunday Gospel readings were convincing us more and more that Christian life is possible only within the Church, under the definite laws of the Church, along with the Divine Eucharist, which is the Tree of Life of the New Testament. So after having brought us to this understanding, the Church begins to show us, explains to us what the life is which surrounds us.

If you will remember, the Gospel before last told us about a certain young man who approached Christ (Mt. 19:16-23). And this young man asked Christ: what shall I do to receive the Kingdom of Heaven? He was like a materialist. He fulfilled accurately everything prescribed by the Law. He himself said, I have fulfilled the commandments. But he fulfilled them as a tradition, as an obligation. And the Lord saw this and said: Then reject everything that you have. In other words, reject the hope you have put in your riches. The young man froze. He could not understand how it is possible to reject this power, the power of the world. Why, through riches we can have everything we want. In such a way the enemy of the human race tempted man and perverted our understanding.

Following that, the last Gospel reading spoke about the workers in the vineyard (Mt. 21:33-42). This vineyard represents in a parable our whole world. The Lord owns this vineyard. And the workers in the vineyard are only servants, who receive everything necessary for their maintenance. And in the end, everything which the vineyard produces must be given back to their Lord. But the vineyard workers saw the beauty of the vineyard, the comfort of life, and decided that in this consists the whole meaning of life, is life itself. They would live. And therefore, when the Heir came, they killed Him. They said to themselves: What do we need Him for? The vineyard is ours. This is ours.

This is exactly what we are doing now. We say of the world and worldly goods: This is ours. And we cannot conceive leaving here. How are we going to part with all our comforts of life? How are we going to reject all our houses, our airplanes, all the inventions which seek to know the world and its mysteries, technology, everything that we are using? How are we going to leave?

And now today the Holy Church points out: we have to fulfil the commandments, and we have to participate in the life around us. Why? Well, because God has sent us here so that through these circumstances, as a means, we would obtain that

which is needed. But what is needed? At the creation of man, God gave him the commandments: love for God and neighbour. And these commandments we must fulfil. The Lord, Who came on earth, came to save man. But how? By fulfilling the commandments of love for God and neighbour, and by giving strength to fulfil these commandments. And in fulfilling these commandments, we receive blessedness.

During His whole evangelistic life Christ was tempted by Satan. In the beginning it was in the wilderness: the temptation was by bread, by miracle, and by kingdom. Rejecting all these temptations, Christ fulfilled the commandment of love for God. After that, the enemy did not approach Christ openly, but only through the hearts of men, hoping to stir up in Christ hatred towards neighbour. But Christ never became angry at a man, but only at the power of the enemy, by saying: "Get thee behind me, Satan" (Mk. 8 :33). In such a way the Lord Himself fulfilled this great commandment, and in His Sacraments gives even to us the forces to fulfil it.

So let us fulfil it! "Which is the great commandment?" asked the lawyer. And the Lord answered: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Mt. 22:36-40).

The One Thing Needful - Archbishop Andrei.

Gospel for the Theotokos Luke 10: 38-42; 11:27-28

Saints of the week

12 / 25 September- Apodosis of the Nativity of the Theotokos - The Hieromartyr Autonomus - A bishop, he left Italy for Bithynia in Asia during Diocletian's persecution, going to a place called Soreoi, where he brought many to the Christian faith and built them a church dedicated to the Archangel Michael. He stayed in the house of a devout Christian, Cornelius, whom Autonomus ordained priest and then consecrated bishop. Not far from the town of Soreoi was a place called Limnae, entirely inhabited by pagans. St Autonomus went to this place and quickly brought many to the light by the Gospel of Christ. This roused the pagans, and they hurried one day to the church of the Archangel Michael in Soreoi and, during divine service, slew Autonomus in the altar, killing also many other Christians in the church. In the time of the Emperor Constantine, a noble courtier, Severian, built a church over St Autonomus's grave. Two hundred years after his death, St Autonomus appeared to a soldier called John. This soldier dug up the saint's relics and found them to be completely uncorrupt, and many of the sick received healing from them. Thus God glorified him who glorified Him while in the body. The Hieromartyr Cornutus, Bishop of Iconium; The Holy Martyr Julian with his 40 Companions; Our Holy Father Daniel of Thasos; The Holy Martyrs Macedonius, Tatianus and Theodulus.

St. Ailbe of Emly - He was the child of a clandestine union. The father, fearing King Cronan, fled before the child was born. The King ordered that the baby be killed but his servants left him near a rock where, it is said, a wolf nursed him. The child was later found by a passerby - Lochan - who gave him to some Britons in the neighbourhood. A tradition held that he went to Rome and was ordained bishop by the Pope. He preached throughout Ireland, and made people "not only Christians but saints." He founded the monastery of Emly which became very important in Munster. A ninth century Rule bears his name. And the wolf? Ailbe was able to save the wolf when he was present at a run at which she was to be killed. She ate from his table from then on.

Tropar of St. Ailbe Tone 4: When Ireland's Enlightener returned to his native land,/ he found thee, O holy Ailbe, preaching the Faith at Emly,/ where at the bidding of an Angel thou hadst built a church./ O wise shepherd of souls and glorious ascetic,/ O friend of animals, and fellow missionary with the illustrious Patrick,/ pray to Christ our God that we might also become bastions of Orthodoxy/ and a shining example to our fellow countrymen,/ drawing them away from ignorance and error/ and into the true Faith that all our souls may be saved.

13 / 26 September - Forefeast of the Exaltation of the Cross - The Consecration of the Church of the Resurrection.

When the holy Empress Helena found the Lord's Cross in Jerusalem, she stayed longer in the city and built churches in Gethsemane, in Bethlehem, on the Mount of Olives and in other places that commemorated the life and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. On Golgotha, where she found the Precious Cross, she began to build an enormous church, under whose roof would be the places both where the Lord was crucified and where He was buried, the holy Empress wanting to bring under one roof the places of His suffering and His glory. But Helena went to the Lord before this magnificent church was completed. It was finished in the same year in which Constantine completed thirty years on the throne, and so the consecration of the church and the Emperor's Jubilee were fixed for the same day, September 13th, 335. At that time, a local Council of bishops was meeting in Tyre. These bishops, with many others, made their way to Jerusalem, to the solemn consecration of the Church of the Resurrection of the Lord. It was then instituted that this day, as a day of victory and triumph for the Church of Christ, should be celebrated every year. The Hieromartyr Cornelius the Centurion; The Holy Martyrs Macrobius and Gordian; The Holy Martyr Ketevana, Queen of Georgia; Our Holy Father Hierotheos.

14 / 27 September - Fast Day - Wine & Oil allowed - The Universal Exaltation of the Precious and Life-giving Cross - Epistle 1 Cor. 1:18-24 & Gospel St. John 19: 6-11, 13-20, 25-28, 30-35 - On this day are commemorated two events connected with the Precious Cross of Christ: the first, the finding of the Cross on Golgotha and the second the returning of the Cross to Jerusalem from Persia. Staying in the Holy Land, the holy Empress Helena decided to look for the Precious Cross of the Lord.

An old Jew called Judah was the only person who knew the whereabouts of the Cross, and, under pressure from the Empress, he revealed that the Cross was buried under the Temple of Venus that the Emperor Hadrian had built on Golgotha. The Empress ordered that this idolatrous temple be pulled down, and then, digging deep below it, she found three crosses. While the Empress was in uncertainty about how to recognise which cross was the Lord's, a funeral procession passed by. Then Patriarch Macarius told them to place the crosses one by one on the dead man. When they placed the first and second on him, the dead man remained unchanged, but when they placed the third on him, he was restored to life. By this, they knew that this was the Precious and life-giving Cross of Christ. After that, they placed it on a sick woman, and she recovered. Then the Patriarch raised the Cross aloft for all to see, and the people sang with tears: 'Lord, have mercy!' The Empress Helena had a silver casing made, and placed the precious Cross in it. Later, King Chozroes conquered Jerusalem, took the people into slavery and carried the Lord's Cross off to Persia, where it remained for fourteen years. In 628, the Greek Emperor Heraclius was victorious over Chozroes and brought the Cross back to Jerusalem with great ceremony. Entering the city, Heraclius was carrying the Cross on his back, but suddenly the aged Emperor was unable to take another step. Patriarch Zacharias saw an angel directing the Emperor to take off his imperial robes and walk beneath the Cross along the way that Christ had walked, barefoot and humiliated as He had been. He passed this vision on to the Emperor, who stripped himself of his raiment and, in poor clothing and barefoot, took up the Cross, carried it to Golgotha and placed it in the Church of the Resurrection, to the joy and consolation of the whole Christian world. St Placilla the Empress; Our Holy Father, the Martyr Macarius of Salonica; Our Holy Mother Maria of Tarsus.

15 / 28 September - Afterfeast of the Exaltation of the Cross - Fast Day - The Holy Martyr Nicetas - Nicetas was a Goth by birth, and a disciple of Bishop Theophilus of the Goths, who took part in the First Ecumenical Council. When Athenarik, Prince of the Goths, began to persecute the Christians, St Nicetas stood before the prince and denounced him for his paganism and inhumanity. Tormented by terrible tortures, Nicetas the more strongly confessed his faith in Christ, and prayed to God with thanksgiving. His mind was unceasingly lifted up to God and immersed in Him, and in his hand beneath his robe he held an icon of the holy Mother of God with the pre-eternal Christ Child standing and holding the Cross in His hands. St Nicetas carried this icon because the holy Mother of God had appeared to him and comforted him. Finally, the torturer threw Christ's martyr into the flames, in which St Nicetas breathed his last; but his body remained untouched by the fire. His friend Marianus took his body from the land of the Goths (Wallachia and Bessarabia) to Cilicia, to the town of Mopsuestia, where he built a church dedicated to St Nicetas and placed the wonderworking relics of the martyr in it. Nicetas suffered and was glorified in 372. Our Holy Father Philotheus; The Holy Martyr Porphyrius; The Holy Martyrs Theodotus, Asclepidote and Maximus; St. Vissarion, Archbishop of Larissa; The Holy New Martyr John of Crete; St. Joseph of Alaverdsk.

16 / 29 September - Afterfeast of the Exaltation of the Cross - The Holy and Great Martyr Euphemia - Born in Chalcedon, her father was the senator Philophronus and her mother's name was Theodorisia, both devout Christians. Euphemia was a girl beautiful in both body and soul. When the Proconsul, Priscus, celebrated a festival of sacrifice to Ares in Chalcedon, forty-nine Christians absented themselves from the festivities and hid themselves. But they were discovered and brought before Priscus, holy Euphemia being among them. When the furious Priscus asked them why they had not carried out the imperial command, they replied: 'Both the Emperor's commands and yours must be obeyed if they are not contrary to the God of heaven. If they are, they must not only not be obeyed; they must be resisted.' Then Priscus put them to various tortures for nineteen days, from day to day. On the twelfth day, he held Euphemia apart from the others and began to flatter her beauty, hoping to bring her thus to idolatry. When all his flattery proved fruitless, he ordered that she be tortured. First, she was put on a wheel, but an angel of God appeared and broke it. Then he had her thrown into a fiery furnace, but she was preserved by God's power. Seeing this, two soldiers, Victor and Sosthenes, came to faith in Christ, for which they were thrown to the wild beasts and thus finished their earthly course with glory. After that, Euphemia was thrown into a pit filled with water and all kinds of poisonous reptiles, but she made the sign of the Cross over the water as she went into the pit, and remained unharmed. She was finally thrown to the wild beasts and, with a prayer of thanksgiving, gave her soul into God's hands. Her parents buried her body. She suffered in the year 303, and entered into eternal joy. (St Euphemia is also commemorated on July 11th.) Our Holy Father Dorotheus; St Cyprian, Metropolitan of Kiev; The Holy Martyr Ludmilla; **St. Ninian, b of Whithorn (apostle of the E. Picts) (Galloway, c.432)** - Ninian's father was a Cumbrian chief. When his son embraced Christianity, he decided to visit Rome, where for many years he advanced in holy virtue and self-discipline. But Ninian never forgot the fellow-Britons who still did not know the Gospel. He decided to return home. In 394 Ninian was consecrated bishop by Pope Siricius. On his way back to Britain Ninian was befriended by Saint Martin of Tours. He founded his see at Whithorn, and there built a stone church which became renowned as the 'White House'. When Ninian heard of Martin's death he dedicated the church to his friend. Almost certainly this White House was the oldest Christian foundation in Scotland. Ninian founded a monastery close by, and from here he and his monks persuaded the southern Picts inhabiting the Grampians to 'abandon the errors of idolatry' (as the Venerable Bede put it 'and accept the true Faith'. Saint Ninian travelled tirelessly. His diocese was huge, stretching from near present-day Glasgow as far as Westmoreland. Although later pagan invaders undid much of his work, his memory lingered; and his success in converting the rulers of Wales was considerable; **St. Edith, abbess of Wilton, England (984)** - Daughter of King Edgar and St Wilfrida. She became a nun at Wilton in England at the age of fifteen. She reposed at the age of twenty-two, famous for her generosity to the poor and her familiarity with wild animals.

17 / 30 September - Afterfeast of the Exaltation of the Cross – Fast Day - The Holy Martyrs Vera, Nada and Lubov (Faith, Hope and Love), and their Mother, Sophia - They lived and suffered in Rome in the time of the Emperor Hadrian . The wise Sophia (as her name—Sophia— wisdom, indicates) was left a widow and, as a Christian, steeped herself and her daughters in the Christian faith. At the time that Hadrian's persecuting hand stretched out over the virtuous house of Sophia, Vera was twelve, Nada ten and Lubov nine. The four of them were brought before the Emperor, with their arms entwined 'like a woven wreath', humbly but firmly confessing their faith in Christ the Lord and refusing to offer sacrifice to the goddess Artemis. At the moment of their passion, the mother urged her valiant daughters to endure to the end: 'Your heavenly Lover, Jesus Christ, is eternal health, inexpressible beauty and life eternal. When your bodies are slain by torture, He will clothe you in incorruption and the wounds on your bodies will shine in heaven like the stars.' The torturers inflicted harsh torture on Vera, Nada and Lubov one by one. They beat them, stabbed them and threw them into fire and boiling pitch, and finally beheaded them one after the other. Sophia took the dead bodies of her daughters out of the town and buried them, and stayed by their grave in prayer for three days and nights, then gave her soul to God, hastening to the heavenly company where the blessed souls of her daughters awaited her. The Holy Martyr Agathocleia; The 156 Holy Martyrs of Egypt; The Holy Martyr Theodota.

18 September / 1 October - Afterfeast of the Exaltation of the Cross - St Eumenius, Bishop of Gortyna - He gave himself to Christ with his whole heart from his youth, freeing himself of two heavy burdens: the burden of riches and the burden of the flesh. He freed himself from the first by giving away all his goods to the poor and needy, and from the latter by strict fasting. He thus healed himself and was able to heal others. Passionless and filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit, Eumenius shone with a radiance that could not be hidden, as it is written: 'A city set on a hill cannot be hid' (Matt. 5:14), and so holy Eumenius could not be hidden from the world. Seeing him, the people chose him as their bishop in Gortyna. As a bishop, he governed Christ's flock as a good shepherd. He was a father to the poor, riches to the needy, consolation to the sad, healing to the sick and a marvellous wonder-worker. He worked many miracles by his prayers: he killed a poisonous snake, drove out demons, healed many of the sick, and did this not only in his home city but in Rome and in the Thebaid. In the Thebaid, he brought rain from God in a time of drought, and there finally finished his earthly course and entered into the eternal presence of his Lord. He lived and worked in the seventh century. The Holy Martyr Ariadne; The Holy Martyr Bidzini, Prince of Georgia.

HYMN OF PRAISE The Honorable Cross

Save, O God, Thy people! Save, O Lord- By Thine Honorable Cross, Thou dost shine upon us, By the Cross, Thou dost lead us!
The Cross is power and a sign; The Cross is salvation.

Save, O God, the Patriarch And the Assembly of Serbian Bishops; Grant them strength to serve Thine Honorable Cross! The Cross is power and a sign; The Cross is salvation.

Save, O God, all those Who are in authority; May the Most-holy Cross protect them From dark destruction! The Cross is power and a sign; The Cross is salvation.

Save, O God, all people Who pray to Thee. By Thy Cross, may they quickly overcome Every difficulty. The Cross is power and a sign; The Cross is salvation!

REFLECTION

Just as a candle is lighted from another candle, so also a good work is born from a good work. A patrician wanted to donate a gold cross to a church. He summoned a young but experienced goldsmith, gave him a great deal of gold that he weighed out, and told him to fashion whatever sort of cross he desired. The poor goldsmith, seeing what a large donation this patrician was making for the sake of his soul, became inflamed with love for God in his own heart, and decided that he would add his own ten pieces of gold to the amount of the patrician's gold. When the cross was completed, the patrician weighed it, and discovered that it was heavier than the gold that he had given to the young man. He immediately began to scold the young man as a thief, suspecting that he had taken some of the gold and replaced it with some other heavy metal. When the young man saw the patrician so angry, he confessed his deed. He said: "I added from my gold, as the widow gave two mites, in order to receive Christ's reward with you." Hearing this, the patrician's heart was touched, and he said to the honorable young man: "From this day, I take you as my son, and the heir of all my goods."